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## The Tuning Machine

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# Soundings ...

... 2009/10



Saturday 7th November, 2009—8.00pm  
Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square  
Edinburgh

Iain McCurdy

Iain McCurdy	-	<i>Rún na Mara</i>
Saul Rayson	-	<i>Drip Sheet Mix</i>
Gordon Delap	-	<i>Heavy Liquid</i>
David Stalling	-	<i>Parcours</i>
John Lato	-	<i>Les Réactions de la Terre Abandonée</i>
Paul Wilson	-	<i>The Tuning Machine</i>
Iain McCurdy	-	<i>Traitement de choc</i>

*Rún na Mara* explores sounds recorded during a sailing trip between Ireland and Scotland and back on a yacht of the same name.

As I began exploring the sounds in and around the ship, the metaphor of the boat as a musical instrument started to emerge: the vibrating strings of the genoa and mainsail sheets (ropes), the vibrating skins of the sails themselves, the resonating body of the hull and this entire resonant system excited and agitated by the wind and the waves. Layers of oscillation revealed themselves from the plucked string-like humming of the sheets and mast stays, to the metered attack of the bow against each wave. Perhaps the overriding oscillation was the single cycle of the journey itself—like the arc of a piece encompassing the myriad of impatient vibrations contained within.

Like all acoustic instruments, *Rún na Mara* exhibits unintended sound artefacts, the rattling of loose ropes, the squeaking of un-oiled pulleys, which inevitably become part of the instruments character.

Beyond merely presenting these sound observations I have tried to allow them to motivate the transformations I have applied to all sounds within the piece and to drive the gestural, rhythmic and structural mechanisms used.

Gathering the sounds for this piece proved to be one of my more challenging recording experiences as I endeavoured to capture a pristine recording while trying to prevent my expensive recording equipment—and myself—from plunging overboard. Isolating the various sound elements in an extremely uncontrollable environment obviously became an issue—the use of contact microphones attached to rigging, sails or the hull proved to be an interesting solution, as they would record the excitation of the wind and the sea experienced through the object itself rather than through the air where it would mix with all other sounds present.

**Iain McCurdy** (b. 1972) is a composer and sound designer of electroacoustic music, based in Belfast.

His tape and instrumental music has been performed throughout the British Isles, across Europe, and in North and South America and Australia.

Recent work has explored the invention of new interfaces for the performance of electronic music. These designs attempt to conceal the presence of technology and offer simple intuitive control to the user. Each design exploits a simple physical principle; their tactile natures encourage exploration through touch and listening.

Another desire is to create designs that are low cost and that often make use of found objects.

**Saul Rayson**

[3' 45"]

***Drip Sheet Mix (2009)***

The movement and interaction of people, from one wandering individual to the flow round the airport and into a tube station, was a thought I had when I was recently travelling to my family home from Belfast to Oxford. The majority of this piece was conceived during this trip.

**Saul Rayson** (b. 1969) is a percussionist/composer who has increasingly drawn on electronics and techniques of computer music to extend the palette of sounds and textures available to him in his work. Saul currently lectures at the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) at Bangor, County Down, Northern Ireland.

**Gordon Delap**

[8' 00"]

***Heavy Liquid (2008)***

*Heavy Liquid* was composed during a wet Irish summer in 2008.

**Gordon Delap** (b. 1979) comes from Co. Donegal in Ireland. He studied composition at City University, London, and Queen's University, Belfast. He has undertaken residencies at Nadine Arts Centre in Brussels, and at the Technische Universität in Berlin where he carried out research into compositional applications of non-linear plate models. In recent times he has received commissions from the British Council, Spacenet, the Naughton Gallery, and Radio 3, and in 2005 he won first prize in the Projet Itinerant competition 'Point de Repere'. He is currently lecturer in music technology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

**David Stalling**

[11' 00"]

***Parcours (2007/2009)***

The sounds heard in this piece are mainly based on field recordings of traffic noise captured in 2001 in parts of Dublin, with some added piano and string sounds, raw and processed. While the rhythms of pedestrian beacons dominate most of the first half, the piece later becomes somewhat more sustained and reflective.

*Parcours* was first performed in 2007 at the Ear-drum Festival in Dublin in a version for live instruments and 8-channel tape. This is the first performance of the current version for stereo tape.

**David Stalling** (B. 1971) is from Germany and now lives in Dublin. His compositional practice includes music for concert performance, dance and film, as well as site-specific sound and audiovisual installations.

His work has been performed and exhibited in Europe, North America, Canada, Egypt, China and Japan. As a performer and improviser, David has worked with numerous artists and ensembles in Germany and Ireland, including Danny McCarthy & Mick O'Shea *aka* The Quiet Club, Slavek Kwi, Schirin Nowrousian, Michaela Fünfhausen, Tanztheater aus der Zeche, SounDin, and EAR Ensemble. He also maintains an ongoing collaboration with artist Anthony Kelly. Some of their works have been released on the sound art label [farpointrecordings.com](http://farpointrecordings.com) and on Wire Tapper 16 and 20, distributed with Wire Magazine.

David is a founding member and director of EAR Ensemble and a member of Solus film collective. He is represented by the Contemporary Music Centre, Ireland.

<http://www.davidstalling.com/>

<http://www.cmc.ie/>

**John Lato**

[6' 36"]

***Les Réactions de la Terre Abandonnée (2006)***

Immersive soundscapes, interesting materials, creative sonic transformations. The basic elements of many electronic works are interesting in themselves, but unless the music has a structural sense the result is flat and lifeless. The elements of this piece are interesting and closely connected, and at first they were the music. After pounding, cutting, shaping, and firing the pieces, this is the result, vibrant and dynamic—at least to my ears.

**John Lato** has written music in a wide variety of different media, ranging from the symphonic band to acousmatic tape music. Mr. Lato has numerous performances of his chamber and wind ensemble works throughout the United States, and his electronic music has been performed across the US and Ireland, including performances at the 2005 International Computer Music Conference, SEAMUS, and Spark festivals. He was awarded 1st prize in the 2008 ASCAP/SEAMUS Student Composer Commission Competition. John received the DMA from UT-Austin in 2009, where he studied with Russell Pinkston and Donald Grantham. John is currently living in Maynooth, Ireland.

**Paul Wilson**  
[9' 59"]

### ***The Tuning Machine (2008)***

The first movement of the *Tuning Machine* was composed during the wettest summer in Northern Ireland I can recall. This movement is only 10 minutes in duration and contains just a fraction of the material I recorded from the rain that drenched the landscape during August 2008. The sound of the rain was captured from many different spaces. The spaces filter and shape our impression of the rain. Some of the spaces conjure images of relative safety and comfort: we hear the sounds of rain on different surfaces but from an inside location. Other spaces are more open and conjure very different images.

Throughout *The Tuning Machine*, the pitch material and harmonic language is developed from sounds that exist in the world around us. Sometimes the sounds resonate in a particular space and that resonance suggests a pitch or interval that is abstracted from the recording and woven into the fabric of the work. This harmony surrounds us every day but we have to stop and retune our own minds to receive it.

**Paul Wilson** (b. 1974) is a composer working at the Sonic Arts Research Centre in Belfast. His music usually involves instruments and electricity to some extent. If you are interested in reading more about him you can always use some electricity to look at his website: <http://www.paulwilson.ie/>

**Iain McCurdy**

[11' 12"]

***Traitement de choc* (2003)**

All the sounds heard in *Traitement de choc* are derived from recordings made on various pianos.

The sound transformations used in this piece almost entirely make use of a number of granular synthesis devices of my own design. Having total control over the workings of these instruments allowed me to explore ideas such as regularity and periodicity in opposition to irregularity and non-periodicity in finer detail. Control over all attributes of the grains and of their parametric progression on a grain by grain basis offered the scope I required while using an otherwise tried and tested sound processing technique.

For the source recordings two different pianos were used. The first was a Steinway Grand, and the second was an unused piano that was no longer needed.

The significance of using an unwanted piano for some of the source recordings meant that certain techniques could be employed that could potentially damage the instrument. In fact, the recording of source materials for this piece resulted in the complete destruction of the piano.

Thanks are due to Queen's University School of Music for the donation of a piano to facilitate the preparation of this piece.





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